

Tree Planter Protection Issues.

This piece is meant to inform/educate and not necessarily to advocate for a specific position on the look for our planting pits in the City. – Dennis Szymanski

Healthy plantings in streetscapes help create visual continuity, define pedestrian spaces, provide canopy and a buffer for pedestrians, aid in water and heat control, and contribute to storm water and pollution management. Protecting the trees and shrubs in the streetscape on our main street corridors, could impact branding, identity, economic activity, accessibility and safety and, as a result, provide community and environmental benefits.

Note: this will only address the “look” of the planter. Innovative tree planting techniques and suggestions for tree maintenance and viable tree species are separately addressed. Planter location/siting should be part of a separate discussion around Setback.

A key concern is protecting plants. Street trees in commercial areas are often damaged or killed by compacted soil and by heavy applications of salt to the sidewalks in winter. Shrubs and flowering plants can be damaged and killed by pet urine. Planters in our business district(s) should protect vegetation from pedestrian-caused compacting of the root space, from salt applied during the winter season and from pet waste.

How?

Edging. Effective planter edging prevents the loss of soil and mulch and discourages pedestrian traffic on tree root zones. Edging can be designed to allow rainwater from the sidewalk (and from the street if part of a storm water management plan) to flow into the planted area. Openings in the edge treatment can allow for water to pass through.

Protective edging may take many forms and varieties exist in degrees of quality throughout Metropolitan Washington, including the “bullnose” edging in Falls Church. Some successfully protect plantings; some not so much.



Edge Fencing.

In areas of moderate to low pedestrian traffic, edge fencing is used to protect planters from pedestrians and pet use. Edge fencing should be decorative metal 18" high, with no sharp edges and treated to prevent rust. The ADA may require the base of the fencing to be solid for 4 inches to allow for cane detection.



6th and E St, SW, Washington, DC

Protective Grates and Guards.

In limited locations, such as heavily traveled sidewalks where sidewalk width limits pedestrian movement, it may be necessary or desired to install tree grates to provide an adequate walking surface. Grates are expensive and block access for weed control, are a potential safety concern due to tripping hazards, and over time interfere with tree diameter growth and need to be removed/replaced.



Tree guards are an opportunity to provide a special design and to incorporate artistic elements. Tree guards may be useful on heavily traveled sidewalks for the protection of newly planted trees adjacent to heavily used bus stops or adjacent to other land uses.



Planter maintenance. The life cycle cost of planter maintenance, including the replacement of plantings, should not be overlooked. Raised planter edging, like the bull nose in Falls Church, requires far less periodic maintenance than planters that are open to pedestrian traffic, pet waste and road salts.



Pearson Sq planter